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ABSTRACT

This address focuses on the vital role language instruction plays in the development and maintenance of international trade relations between the United States of America and other trading powers. The crisis in international trading caused by an excessive flow of American dollars to foreign countries is discussed in terms of future trade relations. Concluding remarks depict a time in which America will become more dependent on foreign trade and thus, the need for American speakers of foreign languages will increase. (RL)

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Let's prepare for the future --
an international future!
(Foreign Language Education)

by

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Let's prepare for the future--an Internationale Future

Several other titles would be equally appropriate. For example "Foreign Language Education"--or "International Trade and Your Community"--or "How to sell your community's products in Swahili, Arabic, Finlandais, Malaysian and dozens of other languages"--.

And if I may briefly interrupt to show how illogical our language programs really are, from an industrial viewpoint. The greatest competitors of the U.S. today are the Japanese and the Germans. How many schools do you know of that are teaching Japanese? With German being deemphasized is this logical, because - don't forget, and I'll emphasize this later on, every time you see a VW on the street that means that we have sent dollars to Germany. And the same goes for Japan. The question is, how are we going to get our dollars back? If we don't, we will soon be in the same trouble Great Britian is in right now.

Here at home we have a saying--"another day, another dollar." But in the world of tomorrow and, indeed, already to a great extent today that becomes "another day, another peso"--"Another day, another Dinar" if you happen to be in Algeria--or if you're in Japan, "Another day, another yen."

The object of my talk today is to alert you to the importance of keeping those yens, marks, pesos and pounds flowing into your community;--to ask whether this community, and many more like it, is doing its job to assure our future in the international market-place. I don't wish to bore you with statistics; however, permit me to translate a few into some meaningful terms in order to put the international picture into perspective here at home, namely in Syracuse. The same would hold true of the Triple Cities Area.

What would happen to this community if approximately 3000 employees of a primary industry, e.g. trademen, semi-professionals, and professionals suddenly found themselves unemployed? Compound this unemployment by those who work in ancillary or supporting industries and then, finally, to the depart-

ment stores and shopkeeper's levels.

It is a sober picture to contemplate, but nonetheless indicative of what would happen if our income from foreign trade suddenly dried-up.

I'd hate to think what would happen to our already overburdened welfare roles.

If any of you gentlemen read the Sunday Herald-American in Syracuse of May 19, 1968, you would have noted the words of the business editor, Mr. Kenneth Sparrow,--and I quote, "Exports of manufactured products have reached approximately 100 million dollars annually to become an important segment of the economy of the Syracuse metropolitan area."

Mr. Sparrow goes on in his article to mention U.S. Department of Commerce statistics which report that our metropolitan area earned 88.8 million dollars in 1966.

This essentially means that our local income from foreign trade in primary industries is increasing annually at a rate of 10%, which is twice our national growth rate.

As such, our international income can be estimated to be \$200 million annually by 1975;--that is when our present generation of teenagers is coming out of college.

Projected a little further into the future--when today's first graders step into the business world, chances are that 20 to 25% of their income will be coming from overseas sources.

This naturally presumes certain pre-conditions such as a relatively peaceful world,--a continued healthy business climate, and by this I mean keeping the present inflationary trend and mounting labor costs under control so as to remain competitive with cheaper foreign labor.

--and finally, to assure that the educational systems of our community are preparing the youngsters of today to cope with the exigencies of the present and the challenges of an international future.

There is no need for me to emphasize the magnitude of the international responsibilities thrust upon the shoulders of the United States during the past 10 years.

The demise of the British Empire, the retreat of the Dutch from Indonesia and the Far East, the withdrawal of the French from Africa and Indochina have left immense vacuums to be filled.

The most immediate voids were those of economic assistance which only the United States was capable of filling on the massive scale required.

All of us here recall programs extending all the way back to the "Marshall Plan" conceived to rebuild a war-torn Europe--to the Alliance for Progress of more recent vintage,-developed to assist our Latin neighbors.

In recounting these points my objective is to underscore one basic fact--no nation in the history of the world has had greater international responsibilities than the United States does today--no nation has ever been called upon to assume and adjust to these responsibilities during a shorter span of time, namely 20 jet-propelled and atomic-powered years.

It is, therefore, little wonder that we have become the object of considerable foreign criticism. We were bound to make mistakes. The challenge with which we are being confronted is comparable to a child who has just learned his multiplication tables and is suddenly called upon to solve his first problem in calculus.

As a result, we have reacted with rather trite expressions such as "these foreigners just don't understand us" or how about--"and that's the thanks you get after helping them win two wars and getting them back on their feet."

These responses suggest that we have not yet faced up to the problem at hand. It is indicative of our concern with ourselves and demonstrates a lack of empathy or sensitivity for their problems. What, then, must we do?

The answer, I believe,--to borrow some American expressions--is to "know something about the market"--"know how to sell"--that is, "know how to sell yourself,"--"put yourself in the customer's shoes"--this is empathy. American business is built upon salesmanship--we are a nation of salesmen--but unfortunately, too often we have failed to apply these principles outside of our own borders.

"Knowing something about the market" is knowing that most foreigners have considerable less than we do,-- knowing that they are proud of their national heritage and of what they have, however little--knowing that most have been exposed to much more tribulation than we and may very well have the edge on us with respect to experience gathered in the school of hard knocks.

The last thing they want to be reminded of, in word or attitude, is that they owe us anything. From personal experience let me add that I have heard a Frenchman remind an American acquaintance that many of the rifles, money, and supplies used by our Minutemen during the Revolution came from France. They are keenly aware of the roles played by General Lafayette,--they know that John Paul Jones' famous phrase "I have not yet begun to fight" was made while commanding the Bon Homme Richard--a gift from Louis XVI.

I further urge you to contemplate the nationalities of names such as: Kosciusko, von Steuben, Gates, Pulaski, among many others who have come to OUR aid in time of need.

Knowing how to sell yourself is putting yourself in the foreigner's shoes.

It is knowing that the average skilled tradesmen in Europe earn \$200-\$250 per month. It is knowing that he spends 1/3 to 1/2 of this income on food. In other countries of the world--practically all of his income. It is knowing that only 10 percent of all Europeans have central heating,--that half have only one cold water spigot in their home.

Admittedly, conditions are changing, but it will be a while before they approach our standards. As such,--and I speak from personal experience--don't patronize them by overtipping. Don't leave those plates partially full of food in restaurants--to them it's still wasteful and considered throwing your money around--don't talk about golf,--to them it's still a rich man's sport--don't raise a fuss if that martini isn't dry enough. Bear in mind, they have a frailty common to all of us, "they're

jealous of the Jones' next door," and, of course, we are the Jones and they don't appreciate having it rubbed in. Unfortunately, this is the image they have now of too many Americans. I'm sure it is an exaggerated image, but nonetheless, we must change it.

As you all are well aware, it is hurting us diplomatically, as well as business-wise.

Remember, never before have so many people of one nation, namely the United States, been traveling about the world. As such, we must become more International in our attitudes and sensitive to the problems of our foreign friends.

We must do a "better job of selling OURSELVES" if we want to do a bang-up job of selling those products produced here at home. Every time an American goofs off and makes a fool of himself, he makes it harder for me to bring those dollars back home, because the image he has left rubs off on me. He's making it tougher for the overseas American to sell American products abroad.

If you doubt that the situation is urgent, look back two years at the gold crisis.

If you've enjoyed overseas vacations to Europe, the Caribbean or elsewhere, please note that devaluation means it will require more dollars--not less--to take that holiday.

What must we do here at home? If there is any one area which could be singled out in which we are presently most deficient and which could have the most beneficial effect if we corrected it,--then it is our inability to communicate in foreign languages.

Permit me to make an important point with respect to Europe in particular and the world in general.

Education at the high school and college level is still to a large extent reserved for the top third or less of the population--those of this group who do graduate, have one thing in common and which is looked upon as a mark of good education

and intelligence-it is the ability to speak foreign languages.

--It is a carryover from medieval times when the mark of education was the ability to speak Latin and Greek--and it is still true today. In Europe, for example, you don't receive a high school diploma unless you have successfully passed examinations in a minimum of two foreign languages and mostly three if you are taking an Academic course. These languages are usually studied from a minimum of four years to a maximum of 6 or 7, sometimes more.

As such, one of the steps in "Selling Ourselves" to the foreigners is being able to speak a foreign language and preferably their language. In doing so, you have gained an immediate strategic advantage.

Let me add at this point that it can help you to cut your expenses in half as a tourist. It is a standard answer I give to friends and acquaintances when they ask about traveling here or there on a tight budget.

There is another point about languages which you should know-language doesn't just enable you to talk, but it also teaches us to think as a foreigner thinks--you don't really begin to communicate until you think and feel what the other guy is saying. It isn't until then that you can really put yourself into his shoes. From a diplomatic and business viewpoint, it's indispensable at the consumer or man-in-the-street level.

I find it interesting that German is being de-emphasized. Europe is one of our most important trading partners today. From a viewpoint of markets, the German-speaking area with its 83 million people is the largest. If you want to do business in Sweden, Finland, or Holland--German can be used there also. If the political climate in the eastern block countries continues to improve and markets open up--German is the most common western language in Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia. I have personally used it while driving through Bulgaria on my way to Turkey. For those of you unaware of the schools in Cairo. Egypt,-the German elementary and high school is one of the better ones.

I wish to recommend to school administrators, generally, that every time they see a Volkswagen on the street--they should remember that it's one of 300,000 being sold in the U.S. this year. That represents a mighty big pile of dollars going out of this country to Germany. I then recommend that they ask the question as to how we are going to get this money back,--certainly not with American businessmen, secretaries, literature translators, order handlers, advertising men, etc., who only speak English.

Your school system--and many more like it--speak of lack of interest on the part of the students. If I were to use this argument with my superiors, they would counter with--"What are you doing to stimulate interest?" Let's, therefore, ask the same question of OUR school system,--are we stimulating interest by reducing and limiting the language programs or are they undermining it? Can we really afford to leave the interest or choice of a language to a child who is quite unaware of its future significance? The Europeans, Japanese and many others--whose very existence depends on foreign trade, have learned a long time ago that languages are the key to survival and it is for this reason why a child in France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Russia, Japan, etc., are told they must study two or three languages if they desire a high school diploma.

It should be borne in mind that if we wish to enjoy the fruits of international trade, we too are making a serious commitment. As the percentage of our income derived from foreign trade increases, we are becoming more dependent upon it. If it falters, we can be hurt badly--as for example, the British are hurting today. We, therefore, must protect our commitment--the one and only way to do this is to make sure that our youngsters are prepared to run with the ball when we hand it to them.